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Sisyphus Rolls on: Reframing Women's Ways of "Making It" in Rhetoric and Composition

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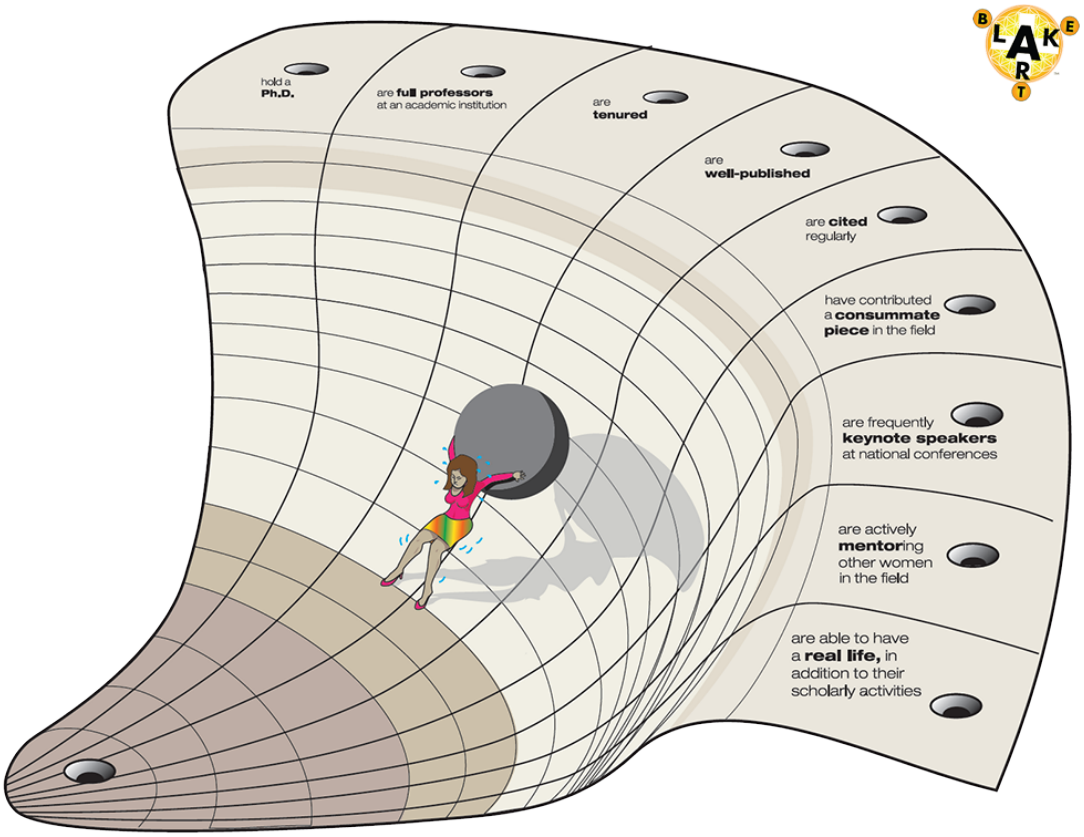
Introduction

The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor.

Albert Camus, 1942

In *Women's Ways of Making it in Rhetoric and Composition*, Michelle Ballif, D. Diane Davis, and Roxanne Mountford compile a list of attributes that define women who have "made it" in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. They argue that to have made it means that women:



This infographic shows what we mean: this woman is Sisyphus, trying to move that boulder into those "making it" benchmark slots. Those slots are the ones proposed by Ballif, Davis, and Mountford (7). As you can see, she's working hard to make it.
See supplemental file for larger image.

The list that they have compiled adheres to a traditionalist set of assumptions about the academy, and about the field of Rhetoric and Composition, which need careful analysis and articulation, particularly in the changing face of institutions of higher learning across the nation.[1]

We argue that in order to adequately analyze and address "making it" in Rhetoric and Composition, we must consider what "Making…"—the process—means, as well as just exactly what the "...It" is. In other words, most of the people who work in the field, according to the definition proposed by Ballif, Davis, and Mountford, have not made it, nor can they. The table/Infographic above, which delineates the proposed ways of making it, disenfranchises the vast majority of those in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. In a field predominantly based in contingent and graduate labor, how can we re-think "making it" as a more productive and inclusive term? And in doing so, is it possible for those in Rhetoric and Composition to become empowered, thus providing a space for those who have not "made it," nor can "make it," using Ballif, Davis, and Mountford's characteristics? Are these points of tension beneficial for our profession to promote agency for those who teach in the field of Rhetoric and Composition?

In this piece, we will share our narratives--our ways of "making it"--and we will also discuss the work the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (CSWP) have done to collect these narratives. Some of us are members of this committee; some of us aren't; all of us, though, can relate, as maybe many of you can, to the woes of Sisyphus.

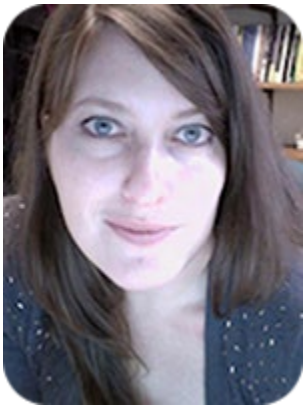
Our methodology and the CSWP project have a long and diverse history in the field. In a 1995 article in *College Composition and Communication*, Gesa Kirsch and Joy Ritchie framed the politics of location: "In what Adrienne Rich calls 'a politics of location,' theorizing begins with the material, not transcending the personal, but claiming it" (7). The Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession for the Conference on College Composition and Communication has undertaken an interview/oral history project known as "Women's Lives in the Profession Project" (WLPP). Recently, the CSWP partnered with the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN) at The Ohio State University to create a repository of these women's narratives. The purpose of this interview/oral history project is to gather diverse narratives (audio, video, written) of the working lives of women teaching at a variety of institutions and in a variety of different work arrangements: tenure-track, non-tenure-track/contingent, administrative appointments, online teaching, TAships, and more. In gathering these narratives, the Committee hopes to extend and complicate work that has already been done to assemble and make available women's work narratives through published research accounts such Theresa Enos's *Gender Roles and Faculty Lives* (1996) and *Women's Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition* (Mountford, Ballif, and Davis), a book frequently mentioned throughout this piece. We believe that the representative sample of narratives included, and those collected through the Commission on the Status of

Women in the Profession, productively engage and problematize “making it” and what that might mean for women in the profession.

The following section is made up of two separate yet related components geared toward our goals of rethinking the meaning of “Making It.” Our text focuses on the “It” in this phrase, describing the issues central to current articulations of success in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Interspersed within this text are audio narratives, stories shared by seven very different women who discuss, question, and reflect on their experiences of being in the field, what defines success, and how we were “made.” By placing these components side by side, we hope to stimulate a discussion about what it means to make it in Rhetoric and Composition and provide other narratives of what it looks like to “make it” in our evolving field.

"Making" and "It"

Kirsti Cole Audio File Transcript:



cole.mp3

Kirsti Cole
A newly hired, recently graduated PhD student reflects on the job market.

As a recently “minted” Ph.D. (2008), I approached the job market determined to find a tenure-track job. I was nervous about it because there were rumors about increased competition and fewer jobs, but like most Ph.D. students, I was groomed to seek a tenure-track position at an institution. The type of institution was left up to me, but the goal was always to find a tenure line, rather than work as contingent labor. In many ways, I am one of the lucky ones. Five different institutions, three of which were at MLA in 2008, all of which were tenure-track, interviewed me. I ended up getting three offers and was able to choose the one that fit my needs the best. Though I made a number of sacrifices in my personal life in order to accept the job, ultimately, I felt like I had grabbed the golden ring. According to the equation set up by Ballif et al, I was on the road to “it,” from Ph.D. to tenure-line with several publications under my belt. However, I interpreted “making it” very differently.

I defended my dissertation in April 2008 and it was, reflecting on what one of my committee members called it, “a love fest.” That said, I had never been, nor have I been since, so nervous. But I got through it, left the room and chatted with my friends and colleagues, all the while warning my mom, who had flown out for the occasion, not to cry. The door opened a little while later and one of my committee members extended her hand to me and said, “Welcome to the field, Doctor Cole.” Then she hugged me. Then I cried, so there was really nothing I could do to stop my mom. I distinctly remember, in the midst of the hugs, the handshakes, and the illicit five ounce bottles of

champagne that my best friend had hidden in her purse, thinking to myself, “I’ve made it.”

I relate my own story for two reasons: one, I recognize that it is a story of privilege—I got interviews, I got job offers, I was able to move across the country in order to accept a tenure-track job—and two, it is a very individualistic story. The individual interpretation of “making it” is the point I want to argue. I do not believe that the prescriptive image of a successful woman in Rhetoric and Composition presented by Ballif, Davis, and Mountford is realistic, or in fact, honest. The image of the successful woman in their configuration is representative of what my graduate school friends would refer to as the “super stars” in the field. At the time I was defending, I considered the “making” part of the equation to have occurred in my Ph.D. program. My “creator” (committee, various professors, peers and students) groomed me not only to be a researcher and teacher, but also to be a scholar in the fullest sense of the word: a member of the professoriate. Upon graduation, I felt that “it” was the successful completion of my Ph.D., and that the job, future publication, possible keynote opportunities and that mythical beast “a real life” were just gravy. In other words, the act of “making” carries with it not only institutional and temporal ramifications, it also implies a creator, someone who is making. It is necessary to call into question what happens to “being made” when the goal of tenure, in the framework offered by Ballif et al, may no longer be possible. Even though I am on the path to “making it,” according to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, that path has a limited shelf life, or at least should, in some authors’ opinions.

A quick review of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and a recent report by the American Association of University Professionals offer up a chilling picture of the current status and future safety of tenure and tenure-track jobs in academia (not that we hadn’t noticed the increase in some institutions of the use of contingent labor, but it’s helpful to have the data). It seems that every day there is news about tenure being called into question, being held up for scrutiny or being done away with altogether. The following article showcases not only the problems with finding a tenure-track job, but also to the highly personal or individualized nature of “making it.”

In the 2010-2011 AAUP Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, a chilling reality is revealed about the changing landscape of higher education. The AAUP Economic Status of the Profession report reflects the effects of the recent economic crisis, using federal data, on the increase of contingent faculty member employment in higher education:

> The pattern of increasing non-tenure-track appointments and decreasing tenure-track appointments was consistent across institution types. The greatest shift was at doctoral universities, which saw the most rapid growth in non-tenure-track positions. The associate’s degree category— composed almost entirely of two-

> year public colleges—showed the smallest increase in total faculty positions and the largest decrease in the number of tenure-track appointments.

The disappearance of tenure lines is extremely problematic for those wishing to "make it" in Composition and Rhetoric according to Ballif, Davis, and Mountford's definition. Tenure's value is not "readily understood by those outside the professoriate," explains the authors of the Report on the Economic Status of the Profession. Institutional, research, and financial support by institutions of higher education is one of the valuable characteristics of tenure. The writers of the Report continue:

> Faculty members serving in contingent appointments, on the other hand, do not have the protections of academic freedom that come with tenure. [. . .] Contingent faculty members find that renewal of their appointments depends more on their ability to please students than their ability to conduct rigorous classes that force students to think critically about the material they are learning. [. . .]. We are not surprised by a lack of rigor in a system where 75 percent of the instructors are off the tenure track and therefore constantly worried about losing their jobs if they push their students too hard. And we take the opportunity to remind legislators, administrators, trustees, and regents that the path to global competitiveness requires rigor in the classroom—and rigor requires investing in the faculty members expected to provide it.

Without the institutional, research, and financial support granted by employment in a tenure-track faculty line, "making it" becomes difficult if not impossible, using Ballif, Davis, and Mountford's characteristics of "making it," for those women who instruct from those lines. Where does that leave the individuals, the women, who teach off the tenure-track? What options are they left with for "making it"? And, can these women be agents of their own making in a higher education system that does not willingly invest in their success?

Martha McKay Audio File Transcript:

mckay-canter.mp3

Martha McKay Canter Reflecting on an unconventional career path.

Everything about my career has been unconventional. After raising a family I returned to school to earn an MA to prepare for a career in teaching English at a community college. Energized by the intellectual community and the promise of a future of research and scholarship, however, I quickly realized that I wanted to teach at a university. I decided that after my MA I would pursue a doctoral degree.

Upon graduation from my master's program, I was offered a job as an adjunct instructor at my home institution where I taught for two years. There I was mentored by my professors-turned-colleagues, mostly women, but some men, too. I would categorize my relationships with them as mutually respectful and intellectually reciprocal. These tenured professors treated me as a colleague, welcomed my contributions and ideas, and encouraged me to continue my education and research. They also counseled me about the brick wall I was likely to encounter when it comes time to seek a tenure-track position after completing my doctorate, but in my characteristic unconventional manner, I applied to graduate schools anyway. My mentors respected my decision despite the grim realities that I may face later. It is noteworthy that a number of these professors also made unconventional career decisions. I consider all of them successful professionals who have "made it," each according to his or her own definition. Their unconventional paths help define their contributions to the academy in distinct and diverse ways. Moreover, because none of my mentors views success narrowly, they "get me" which is invaluable to me.

Having now begun my third year as a doctoral student in rhetoric and composition at the Florida State University, I have learned a great deal about the field, and become familiar with contributions of scholars like Jacqueline Jones Royster, Gesa Kirsch, and numerous others. Consequently, I am more convinced than ever that the idea of "making it" in the field is too complicated and individual a concept to be condensed and defined by a handful of characteristics. In fact, every woman I have worked with has her own definition of what "making it" looks like for her. In my own case, I am a middle-aged woman who will be going on the job market in another year, and I aim to contribute to and teach within the discipline for the next several decades. I approach my career confident that I am responsible for my own agency, and that I get to decide what "making it" means for me.

Unconventionality is the hallmark of my career, and a characteristic I admire and seek in others because of the possibilities it promises. Circumscribed definitions of success and strict adherence to conventionality are overly-simplified summations indicative of a narrow, singular approach to "making it." Whether as an adjunct instructor with an MA

and a semester-long contract earning an unfortunate salary-sans-benefits, or as a graduate teaching assistant looking forward to a professorial position, I am a woman who, by my own definition, "makes it" as a rhetoric and composition professional each time I achieve a goal I have set for myself. Ballif, Davis, and Mountford might disagree with my self-assessment, but theirs is only one narrow and elite view of women's achievements in the field. For my part, I feel accomplished at each step of the way.

On August 23, 2010, Liz Stillwaggon Swan wrote an article titled "Message in a Bottle." She says, "Many recent Ph.D.'s in my age group grew up listening to The Police and their song 'Message in a Bottle,' which recounts the story of a castaway who yearns to be rescued before he falls 'into despair.' For many of us, that desperately needed rescue did not come last year and might not come this year or next year, we're told, if the academic crunch continues." The way that Dr. Swan framed her article closely aligns with most of the news about the academy today: there aren't jobs, there won't be jobs, and we're lucky to get the jobs we have. Dr. Swan lists her own job search experience. However, in an era of declining tenure, it is troubling that Dr. Swan used the metaphor of "rescue" to constitute finding a job—mostly because it feels true. Many Ph.D. students can relate to a deep sense memory of the sweeping relief upon receiving a job offer—that sense of desperation and fear finally began to abate. At the end of her article, the rescue metaphor is reused in her biographical statement as follows: "Liz Stillwaggon Swan…[has] been rescued from academic despair for 2010-11 by Oregon State University, where she will be a postdoctoral fellow at its Center for the Humanities."

gresham.mp3

Morgan Gresham Having a family and moving on from a dream job.

Morgan Gresham Audio File Transcript:

My first position was the job I was meant to have. I couldn't have written an ad more appropriate to my specialties—composition, electronic pedagogies, and feminism. The program had just reinvented itself, brought in one of the founders of the field of computers and composition as chair, and hired me fresh out of grad school. I was on the graduate faculty, teaching graduate level composition research and pedagogy courses, and I directed the Writing Program and the Writing Center. I worked with a number of fabulous graduate teaching assistants who were eager to learn the field. Simultaneously, I had my first child, an act that interestingly softened some the relations with colleagues who had seen me as an interloper before. I worked a lot, and at the time, I thought, teaching a three-three, directing programs, and serving on committees, that I was overworked. So when I had the opportunity to move to another institution with a lighter teaching load, no administrative duties, and a chance to work with some “superstars” in the field, I took it.

For me, my new institution was a mixed bag. I like teaching composition, and I learned there I would most likely never teach comp again; the closest I would come was teaching the comp pedagogy class to TAs who were interested in teaching, but not interested in teaching composition. I had some wonderful writing colleagues, and I stretched my entry-level professional and technical writing skills into a niche area, technical writing for biology majors. But there, I couldn't call myself a feminist. I could be one, as long as it didn't show too much. And it became apparent that I was too collaborative and feminist—in my teaching and in my scholarship—to be tenurable. Having my second child and stopping the tenure clock sealed the deal. I needed a new place. And this time, my search was going to focus on some of my unspeakable goals to be nearer family and friends—to find a position where I could have more of a life.

Over the past few years, I have watched as my original graduate student cohorts have completed PhDs, gotten jobs, and earned tenure as I have transitioned from place to place. But during the 2009-2010 academic year I, at last, earned tenure. In all three institutions, I have served in administrative positions pre-tenure. And I have had two babies pre-tenure. But it is only when I compare my choices to those who have "made it" do my choices seem unconventional.

I have watched my mentors change jobs and improve, for the most part, their "making it”/made it status in the field. By my count, one mentor has made it in the field; yet, I am not sure that—even though she is a composition “superstar”—she would say that her path is the only way to “make it.” I think that's why she's a mentor for me; our relationship works because it wasn't in her mind for me to be a “mini-me” of her. And I couldn't have had the same path that she took because her kids were older when she

was in graduate school and in her first jobs, she has more energy than the sun, she knows how to find and bring out the best in those around her in ways that benefit all parties. The kind of feminist and collaborator and mentor I strive to be.

What are the implications of the institutional shining armor and white horse for women hoping to "make it" in academia? Problematic to say the least, thinking about finding a job as being rescued also points to the level of stress graduates still feel to find *the* job. Academic despair is a strong term, but it is entirely appropriate if those of us who mentor graduate students still extol the academic and/or tenure-track model as the ultimate goal of graduate school. Equally problematic is the encouragement of students who find contingent positions to remain in them rather than search outside of academy as some kind of demonstration of their commitment.

More recently, Eunice Williams likened the job market to George R. R. Martin's epic, *A Song of Fire and Ice*: "Martin's novels are probably the reason that I'm now treating this year's job market in history like some epic, dismal battle that I will have to face, shield and sword at the ready." Interestingly, the part of the narrative that differs most from Liz Stillwaggon Swan's "Message in a Bottle" is the rescue narrative. Instead, she crafts her foray into the market like the reluctant second son of a warlord, one who must fulfill his birthright to battle.

> Like Tyrion Lannister, second son of a tyrannical ruling family in Martin's fantasy, I'm entering this world of violence reluctantly. I am, after all, an academic who would rather use her brains than compete against hundreds of other applicants for victory. Indeed, I've avoided penning this column because doing so admits that the job market is real. But the job postings for the 2012-13 season have begun to appear, confirming that the time has come to acknowledge reality and make ready to enter the fray. (Williams)

And though we have problematized the rescue narrative above, William's piece reads like there is no possible light at the end of the tunnel unless the appropriate job comes, and this is reality for many potential hires. The sheer prospect of having to pay off student loans is utterly panic inducing (Williams).

> I know that being freaked out in this manner for a year is an unsustainable position. I know that I am being overly compulsive. I know that there will be a plethora of events beyond my control in the ensuing months, which is why I want to be as prepared as possible. Summer must end eventually, you know. And winter is coming. (Williams)

Beyond the sheer panic involved, there is also no explicit connection to looking for tenure in this article, so it would appear that the waning of tenure has trickled down and is now part of the reality of the job market.

Luisa Rodriguez Connal Audio Transcript:

rodriguez.mp3

Luisa Rodriguez Connal Negotiating a career and reflecting on the Latino/a caucus.

I came from a family who placed high value on education, but it did not know how to help me do well in school, nor did they know or understand what was available to help me. Nonetheless, they encouraged me as best they could. In fact, I did fairly well. Not all Latinas have had the same experiences.

I met two professors who worked with me to learn of the various areas I could consider for study. Because over the years, I acquired a great many interests, so finding a field of study was not an easy task. One professor made an appointment with me to discuss these various interests. She suggested a degree in English literature because many of my interests would be discussed during the study of literature. I took her advice. The campus was small and I came to know many of the professors very well and they came to know me and my strengths and weaknesses. Eventually, I completed my Bachelor's degree in English Literature and later a Master's Degree in Composition Studies. From there, I took teaching positions as an adjunct instructor at various community colleges. I thought that earning a doctorate would put an end to my freeway flyer status, so I applied to several universities and was accepted at the institution where I would eventually earn my doctorate.

As I progressed through my doctoral studies, I found that my route through academia, specifically the field of Rhetoric and Composition, took a very snakelike road. In fact, many of the important contributions to the growth of the field of Rhetoric and Composition had long taken place when I finally entered. As I met many of the great contributors to the field, I was unaware of the time, study, and work that they had given to rise in the field. Yet my naïveté did not stop me from hoping to join their ranks. I now understand that time was not on my side to do the kind and quality work required of those who are well-known figures and contributors to our field. My story should underscore the reasons for my claims and current status in the field.

Over the years I have been particularly tough on myself because I did not accomplish or "make it" in the sense that tradition expects doctoral students to make it. I have worked, it is true, but I have yet to attain tenure anywhere. I have written articles and chapters about something I love and that takes in many of my favorite areas of study—language. But the outer trimmings that go with a doctorate, I have not attained. During the process of working on my dissertation and taking classes, I met many people who encouraged and supported my efforts. I cannot stress strongly enough how thoughtful many of these people were.

Unfortunately, I am not a person who fits any mold easily. Moreover, just as my parents did not have a clue as to how to help me when I was younger, many of my friends and

professors did not understand how best to help me learn what I should expect when going for a tenure track position. Despite the fact that my children were now grown and on their own, I still maintained a close connection to them. Often this connection was a distraction, but I could not follow advice given to me by colleagues that I just ignore issues that arose from these familial connections. Still I persevered, and eventually earned the doctorate. I went to places far from family and friends but did not “make it” in the sense of earning tenure.

My children are proud of my achievements and me. They each have a copy of my master’s thesis and my dissertation. I have presented at the CCCC several times, and at the meeting of Modern Language Association. The Latino Caucus has provided me with opportunity to mentor others. Still doubts of “making it” exist in my mind. So I asked a longtime friend and long distance mentor to help me as I ponder the concept of “making it.” Victor Villanueva, Jr. was the first Latino to have prominent speaking roles at the national conferences; he has written extensively, mentored others, and worked with other aspiring people with Ph.D.’s. In fact, he was the first Latino person who inspired me to continue. I felt so isolated during the process of earning the doctorate and later at the various places where I worked that he and members of the Latino Caucus were the people to whom I could turn. The only draw back for me was the time and the geographic distance between us.

I asked Professor Villanueva about his thoughts on “making it,” and I indicated I was still ambivalent about whether or not I had achieved anything in the field of Rhetoric and Composition (*please note: in-text citations are omitted for the following quotes from e-mail conversations, as they would identify an author of this piece*). Professor Villanueva, put things in perspective for me. Speaking about himself he said: “Oh, I see. In Rhetoric and Composition there was only Ralph Cintron and Juan Guerra (both about five or so years behind me). When I came in, the Latinas were Kris and Roseanne, but neither one was really in Rhetoric and Composition (Kris is bilingual education and Roseanne is a linguist). I was it, I'm afraid.”

Because I am a woman and have so many of the traditional roles women hold, I asked Dr. Villanueva whether or not there were costs in life when one strove to “make it” in the world of academia and if he thought it was worth all the work. His reply indicated that he did not feel that there were “losses” connected to “making it” in the field of Rhetoric and Composition, but that “we risk buying into something we . . . should be critical of.” He further said that “making it” fell into the traditional or conventional. For him these things were the usual recognition, promotions, salary raises and “something else—dignity.” Villanueva admits that we can obtain dignity without having attained all the other traditional trappings of success. But for Villanueva the more important thing was that he did not have to become someone he is not to make it. In his words, “it’s cool to make all the conventional white guy notions of having made it without having to bleach myself. All that said, there’s the personal idea of having made it. Me? I think I became well known by telling white folks things that folks of color already know. Because I was the

first, I got to tell them really obvious stuff (obvious to us) which they found new." Dr. Villanueva's statement here justifies my feeling of being retaught what I already knew to be true when reading Said, Spivak, Kenneth Burke and others. More importantly, it pointed out something that has always been difficult for me to see that I would have had to change much to "make it" in the academy. My discussions with Dr. Villanueva show me that even he has had moments of self-reflection where he has experienced self-doubts. He uses the traditional model. Our discussions also point out something that has always been difficult for me to see—that there were places in the academy where there were biases against me. The reason for my seeming myopia stems from an inability to understand hidden agendas. Villanueva says: "As for you. You did all you did in a strange place with lousy conditions (which include racism and sexism, and I didn't have to put up with gender stuff). You are a PhD. You made it." Now, I reflect on all the things Dr. Villanueva and I discussed and the choices I made that were outside of academia. I've made it not because my good friend and fellow Puerto Rican tells me I have. I've made a success of my career choice both in and out of it because I had more things to manage and I had to do it on my own. Perhaps a person with a different psychological profile would have made a greater success of my life. However, I did the best with the situations I encountered and the skills that I had. More importantly I see a different place for myself even if it is not within the traditional ivy halls of a college or university.

This reality seems to be that tenure is either under attack or disappearing as budgets in higher education go, or stay, in the red. Recently the University of Louisiana has begun proceedings that would make it easier to dismiss tenured professors claiming, "the contemplated changes are driven by a tight budget" (Chapman). They postponed the vote in order to garner more feedback from faculty and legal counsel but still seek to legitimate a new series of circumstances for terminating tenured faculty including "a 'reduction' of a program."

Robin Wilson reported, in "Tenure, RIP: What the Vanishing Status Means for the Future of Education," the tenure-track is disappearing. Contingent and short-term appointments are filling the gaps. However, "making it" at both two- and four-year institutions has often included tenure. The AAUP report on the Economic Status of the Profession reported, "a substantial number of tenure-track faculty members have left their institutions and been replaced by faculty members in non-tenure track appointments," according to the higher education institutions that reported data. This scenario is further complicated by recent interpretations of the Affordable Healthcare Act. In an April 2013 release from AAUP on the Affordable Healthcare Act and Part-Time Employees, "One provision of the new law, scheduled to take effect in January 2014, requires employers with more than fifty full-time employees to provide health benefits to employees who work thirty hours a week or more" (Affordable Care Act and

Part-Time Faculty). In response, many institutions nationally are limiting adjunct instructors to two courses per semester, including institutions in Colorado, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Florida, and Virginia (Straumsheim). A continuation of this trend will make it even more difficult for part-time faculty to reach the "making it" goal.

Vi Dutcher Audio File Transcript:

dutcher.mp3

Vi Dutcher
A career without tenure.

In 1994, at age 43, I entered graduate school, excited about my prospects in the Rhetoric and Composition field. Nine years later, I defended my dissertation and, like Speaker 1, celebrated my committee members' welcome. I had made it. By this time, I had also completed two years in a non-tenure-track position (NTT), and, since I deemed it non-negotiable to work without tenure, I negotiated with my university's administration to "turn" my NTT line into a TT one. My husband was about to step down from years in education, an acknowledgement of the degenerative Parkinson's disease that was having an impact on our lives the past eight years. I not only wanted what I considered job security for us, I wanted the whole shebang: teaching, scholarship, service, and the rigor of working with peers in mutual accountability.

As the years passed, I found the work culture isolating. I worked long hours on campus in a very small office with a view to another building. (It had taken a few years to graduate to a room with any view at all.) The offices lined long carpeted corridors, often silent, with faculty working at their desks behind gray steel office doors. I was isolated from a sense of community, caught up in the communal paranoia of whether or not we were "making it." Since the institution that had granted my degree was the same institution that now issued my paycheck each month, I sometimes questioned whether or not I had made it. Would another university, one that did not know me, ask me to dance? I determined to find out and went on the market.

When I was offered a full-time, fixed-interval faculty position at a university nearly four hundred miles away, I accepted, but only after a two-week agonizing decision-making process. I found it no small issue to leave tenure behind. While the school I left is an eight-campus state university with over 30,000 students, the campus where I now make my home is a small, private liberal arts university with 1200 students. In my fifth year here, I am thriving in my role as faculty member and WPA, enjoying administrative and faculty support across the university. When I first arrived, I was told by my dean that I represent the best of both worlds—young in my career yet having the wisdom of an older woman. I have made it.

But have I? Old ways of thinking about tenure die hard. In my previous university, while many of us tenured and tenure-track faculty championed non-tenured faculty members,

we also knew that we were privileged to have our positions of tenure. At my present university, the distinction of tenure and non-tenure does not exist. As a full-time, continuing faculty member, I have had contract renewals each year of my first three years and, more recently, a three-year contract renewal. In 2011, I am eligible to apply for a five-year contract, this university's equivalent to tenure, according to administration. But tenure it is not, at least, not the way I was trained to understand it. I have observed that in this culture, much of the hierarchy that undergirds my previous university's structure is flattened. Is the tenure system inextricably linked with institutional hierarchy and the dysfunctions associated with it? How can we find ways to unravel this? How can we find ways to thrive and experience healthy professions without thinking that we need to be part of systems that often work against our thriving and "making it."

With the disappearance of tenure, could academic security rely on merely having any teaching position, as it has for the adjunct/contingent teaching workforce? If tenure disappears from the landscape of higher education, how will instructors gauge if they have made it? Where does this leave us? How can we "make it" according the structure offered up by Ballif, Davis, and Mountford? We must acknowledge that "making it" differs not only from institution to institution, both two- and four-year, but also as we navigate through our professional careers and personal lives. "Making it" means allowing for more flexibility in "it," including all those instructing writing at the college-level (TAs; adjuncts), not only those who reside in the privileged tracks of tenure and full-time teaching employment.

Ethically, in order to accommodate the new "it," we must respond to the shifting tenure model by adapting the process of "making." We argue that "making it" needs to be personalized and diversified—the token list, the model successes of "making it" in higher education, needs to be re-examined, perhaps even abandoned, in light of the transforming landscape of higher education. Expectations for a career in teaching writing need to be more realistic, more open for diverse avenues of "making it." If not, it is not an unreasonable prediction to make that those instructing in the field of Rhetoric and Composition will find themselves disempowered by a paradigm that does not recognize their place within it. Disenfranchisement and disempowerment will not lead to agency for any of those involved; and in turn, it will weaken our profession.

Can women in higher education be likened to Sisyphus? The answer seems to be a resounding "yes," but why? While it is exciting to point to how many women are taking on positions as Department Chairs, Directors of Writing, and tenured faculty, it is still the case that women across academia still make around 81% of the salary that male faculty members make (Curtis "Faculty"), that women still struggle to achieve the rank of full professor, that women still comprise a majority of part-time and non- tenure track

positions (especially in humanities departments), that women still often find themselves doing more service oriented work than their male counterparts, and that women are still subject to sexual harassment and discrimination in the academic workplace and in their classrooms (Curtis "Persistent" 2-6).

Kristin Bivens Audio File Transcript:

bivens.mp3

Kristin Bivens "Making it" at a two-year institution.

"Dang, girl," a friend from graduate school commented, "You have arrived!" Her comment was in response to my news that I had an e-mail in my inbox from a composition "superstar." I have to admit I felt as though I had made it. When I earned tenure at my two-year institution, a benchmark of "making it" both at two- and four-year institutions, I also felt as though I had "made it"; I had earned tenure with a master's degree. When I was invited to serve on the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession in the summer 2007, I thought I had made it in yet another way. Maybe my friend from graduate school was right, but maybe "making it" is just too fleeting. And most definitely the "making it" benchmarks at two-year institutions diverge, significantly, from four-year institutions.

Maybe my graduate school friend was right at the time, but as our lives enter and exit through the assorted passages of life (for example, marriage; parenthood; parent care), "making it," or even just making do alters, significantly. Phases may be the most accurate way to describe the personal life events that occur; and, within each phase, we confront new and different challenges to "making it." I think there are varying degrees of "making it," and the transforming landscape of higher education begs for diversification in the popular definition of "making it." Securing a temporary position at an institution may not be enough. "Making it" may only be getting by, holding contingent positions at three institutions, as a colleague in my department does. I am certain the popular definition of "making it" in writing studies isn't a major consideration for her, especially since she is currently and primarily concerned with making ends meet. The current model of "making it" excludes 64% of those who teach writing in my department because they are adjunct and contingent faculty.

When I was first hired as a full-time writing instructor, I was single and eager--eager in that way that new professionals just are. I was single, and I had countless hours to devote to my teaching, my quest for tenure, and "making it." It is a few years later now, and the pendulum has swung in a different direction. I am ceaselessly stuck in an

attempt to achieve a sense of balance, professionally and personally. In this capacity, and on a day-to-day basis, I vacillate between "making it" and getting by, especially now as I prepare to write my dissertation and continue to teach full-time; I am exhausted from being a full-time graduate student and teaching full-time. And, I anticipate being a parent will bring even more challenges to this precarious balancing act of the professional and the personal. When I examine the list--the "made it" list from Ballif, Davis, and Mountford--the years of struggle, challenge, and effort isn't calculated, nor do I think it can be. The time investment of achieving even one of those characteristics of "making it" isn't known. If I had chosen to live a life completely and utterly devoted to my profession, I'm sure the list would seem less daunting; however, I teach a four-four load and live an incredibly full personal life—I have what Ballif, Davis, and Mountford refer to as "a real life." "Making it," to me, extends far beyond their list. Achieving balance is an overwhelming and a daily task. I don't really ever suppose I will feel as though I have made it in this capacity, nor will I aspire to. To me, I have made it; and, I am making it, simultaneously and synchronously--in my own way.

At my urban two-year institution, "making it" has not been possible in the traditional sense. The economic climate has meant not filling vacancies in full-time, tenure track positions; filling more and more classrooms with contingent faculty; and proposing to decrease the number of courses offered in developmental education, which all aligns with the recent report by the AAUP on the Economic Status of the Profession. In fact, there is forty-seven contingent faculty in my department and twenty-seven full-time, tenure-track, or tenured faculty. The landscape is changing, but this tends to be the norm at two-year institutions that are charged with meeting the educational and vocational needs of the communities they serve. In theory, when the community's needs change, the two-year institutions that serve those communities need to adapt, too. The catalyst for change now is not only educational, but also financial. Due to the economic climate of the nation, there are different and more prominent corporate stakeholders than in years before; and the motivation and root, or practice, of these changes may not solely be educational and in the best interest of student learning.

It's also an uneasy time in education for educators and students—we are in crisis. Prompted by the economy and an increased national sense of frugality, federal and state funding for higher education has been slow to arrive and institutions face repeated cuts on the chopping block, especially at the state government level. For example, Florida has seen steady decreases in funding over the past 5 years: "In 2009-10, public colleges and universities in Florida received 30 percent of operating funds from the state, versus 56 percent in 1991-92" ("Florida's" 2). Nor is Florida alone. Arizona, New Hampshire, Oregon, and Louisiana all cut more per student than Florida ("Recent" np). And although the Obama Administration and the Department of Education have increased funding for higher education, oversight has increased as well (i.e.,

deliverables and measurable outcomes are required). The offered model of "making it" is increasingly unattainable and unrealistic for most instructors in higher education due to this uneasy and uncertain time in education, and reinforces our Sisyphean journey. This model needs to be amended to include other definitions and models of "making," not to mention to be more inclusive of writing instructors, regardless of their working status (part-time, full-time, contingent, etc).

Compositionists and rhetoricians are Sisyphus. Seemingly never ending frustration and seemingly inadequate efforts keep us, in our diligence, rolling that boulder up the hill with zeal, fervor, and tenacity, only to have the boulder immediately roll back down, keeping the process intact. The complication arises when, briefly, for a moment before reaching the top--that second or so before the boulder is sent back down the hill--there is no elation or triumph, no joy at accomplishing a goal, because the goals, the ways of "making it" have become unattainable for the vast majority of those who teach writing. And just like Sisyphus, the top is never reached; you haven't "made it," and you simply can't, no matter how hard or fast you push that boulder.

schell.mp3

Eileen Schell
Building a career collecting women's narratives.

Eileen Schell Audio File Transcript

The work of this "archive of women's stories" is part of a long tradition of oral storytelling within feminist groups and communities of women. The Women's Network Special Interest Group and the Feminist Workshop, both affiliated with the CCCC and the CCCC Committee, have long been spaces where women from a diverse range of institutions have spoken honestly about their work experiences, material struggles, fears, challenges, and deep questions about how to negotiate their working lives and personal lives and the spaces in-between. As a feminist scholar of gender and labor studies, I have often felt, as the above narratives demonstrate, that the richness of those stories and conversations are not well represented in our scholarly literature in the field. Ironically in a field that prizes diversity and difference we have been far too silent about difference and diversity in our career paths, patterns and realities of our working lives. We have geared our professional network sessions at national conferences toward mentoring colleagues and graduate students to embrace this traditional model of "making it," all the while knowing somewhere, in the back of our minds, that not all will "make it" by these standards and that all might not want to or be able to strive toward

these standards due to both personal and structural conditions (or a combination thereof).

In Susan Hunter and Sheryl Fontaine's edited collection *Writing Ourselves into the Story: Unheard Voices in Composition Studies*, contributors speak to their realities as those who don't fit dominant narratives in our field. As Fontaine and Hunter ask in the introduction: How do we fit into this story [narrated by scholars and researchers and officers of professional organizations]? How do our histories as females moving through non-tenure-track or part-time positions, to full-time yet untenured ones, holding administrative posts, teaching at non-research institutions compare with the history of someone who is male or tenured or teaching primarily graduate students. (9) And how are these stories tied—or not—to "making it" to a place of professional success? What is success? Who gets to decide? And who is left out when success is defined in ways that privilege particular economic, social, and structural measures or realities (institutional type or scholarly profile)?

In *Gypsy Academics and Mother-teachers*, I address the work of women holding contingent teaching jobs through interviews and a survey of published literature on women's work narratives. The interviewees in my study were women who are not "making it" by any standard measures of the field in terms of having doctoral degrees, numerous publications, stability in their teaching contracts, and yet their stories and realities are demonstrative of where much of our field's energy lies—in work with students and colleagues in writing classrooms. In my second book, the co-edited collection *Moving a Mountain*, contributors provide narratives of contingent faculty and their supporters who are working to better their working conditions through various processes, including professionalization, coalition building, and unionization. These are so-called "unheard voices" making themselves heard and often vociferously so through union organizing meetings, coalition building, meetings, and direct action. They tell another narrative of the field—one of labor conflict and struggle and negotiations over pay, benefits, professional respect, and working conditions. These are stories like the ones featured in articles in the electronic journal *Workplace: A Journal of Academic Labor* or in Marc Bousquet's video blog stories of contingent and graduate student workers engaged in a struggle for respect, recognition, and some semblance of workplace rights in a system that counts on their contingency and exploitation. What we can take away from such professional work narratives is a sense of the material conditions that confront our field and the ways that individuals—both singly and collectively—confront and work within and against those conditions. These are narratives we must hear, heed, and engage as they are the narratives of where the majority of our field resides.

As the narratives from this piece point out, what does "making it" look like at in different institutions—at a two-year urban college, for instance—and in different phases or passages of one's life—as a newlywed, a mother, a person caring for elderly parents? What does "making it" look like when we are in the middle of a recession that is proving

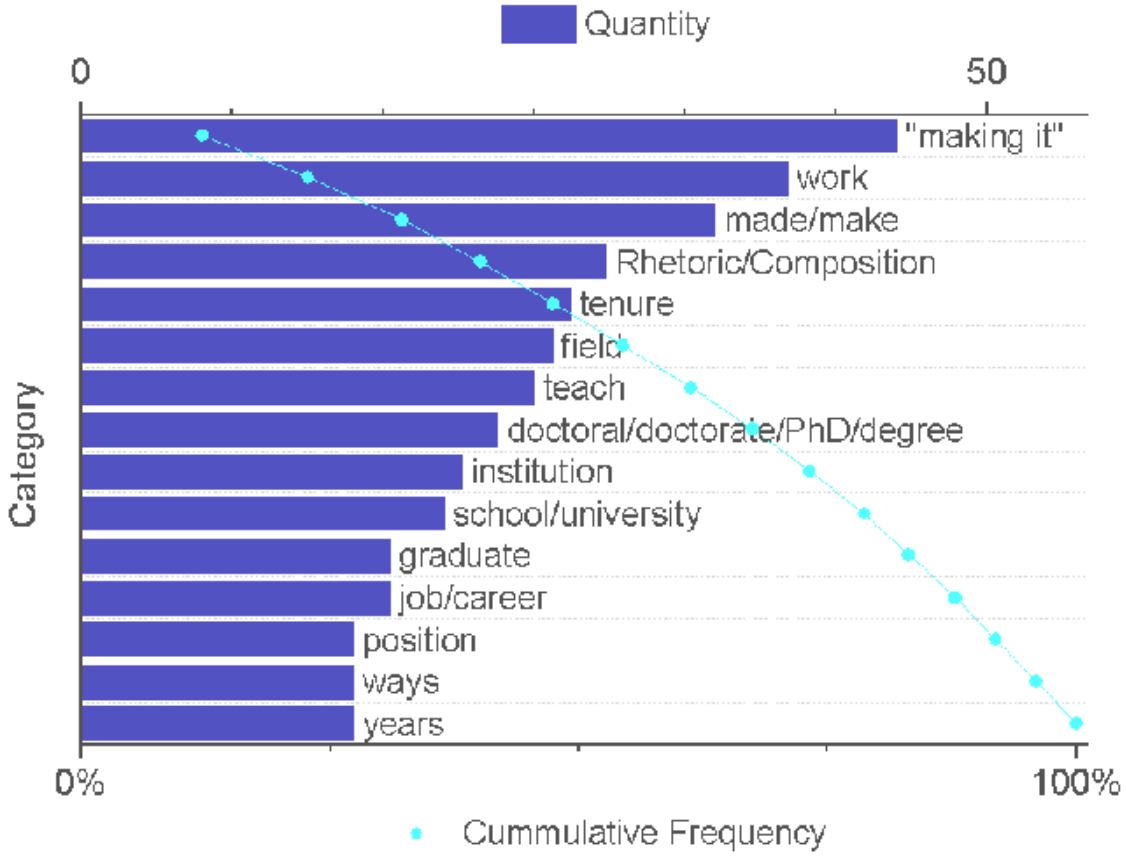
to be much deeper and longer than any of our expert economists cared to admit? We must conceptualize the process of “making it” as one that is highly individualistic, and dismiss dated and suspect notions of success that have less and less foundation in the current model of higher education in the United States. Perhaps instead of “making it” we will find ourselves telling stories of “making it” through.

Perhaps, though, unlike the myth of Sisyphus, there are goals or milestones or triumphs we reach that are not so grand as the women honored and highlighted, and rightfully so, in Ballif, Davis, and Mountford’s *Women’s Ways of Making it in Rhetoric and Composition*. Perhaps we should gauge our “making it” by a different standard, by a different model--a model that reflects the women who are teaching writing in our field? This model can begin to be discussed through the narratives in this piece.

"Making It"

What We Mean by "Making It"

The word cloud and paretographs are selective representations of some of the most frequent words used throughout the entire article. These words characterize words we used to write about “Making It.”



This paretograph is a selective representation of the fifteen most frequently used words throughout the entire article. We wanted to see what we were saying in this piece, so this representation characterizes the words we used to write about “Making It.”

See supplemental file for larger image.

Once again, we wanted to see what we were saying, so this word cloud includes the fifteen most frequently used words from our piece. It does not include, however, our individual recorded narratives. Both the infographic and paretograph aimed to reveal the keywords in the discussion we have about "making it" in our conversation.
See supplemental file for larger image.

Conclusion

Women's ways of "making it," then, can perhaps be defined as ways of telling stories and negotiating realities about what it means to work, to struggle, to hope, to meet the demands and challenges of teaching, learning, writing, and being. The process of taking and recording women's stories of their work lives—whether done individually or with others—is an important task for our profession and an important way of making sense of our current historical moments and the future to come. As we reflect on the narratives above, and on the work done in the in the Digital Archive repository for the CWSP narratives, we hope to add our response to the questions asked by Kirsch and Ritchie about the politics of locations and the issues of "power, gender, race, and class" (7) so prevalent in the field, and glossed over in the framework offered up by Baillif, Davis, and Mountford. In "Methodological Dwellings: A Search for Feminisms in Rhetoric and Composition," Jennifer Sano-Franchini, Donnie Sackey, and Stacey Pigg reflect on the work of Jacqueline Jones Royster, Malea Powell, Gwedolyn Pough, and Terese Guinsatao Monberg. They argue that Monberg, "describes a methodology of listening that goes beyond what is textually visible and documented in oral history, arguing that a feminist methodology of listening beyond the text will allow us to uncover women's rhetorical roles behind the scenes--for example, in shaping and enabling certain discourses to exist" (87). The narratives shared above reflect what is behind "making" in

order to problematize and grapple with the role of “it” in women’s lives in Rhetoric and Composition.

It is our hope that in order to continue telling stories and negotiating the realities of women’s lives in the field, that individuals reading this article will participate in the Women’s Lives in the Profession (WLPP). The goals for the Women’s Lives in the Profession interview/oral history project are two-fold. First, as per a 2009 call issued by General Secretary Gary Rhoades of the AAUP, this project aims to counter the stereotypical images of professors so common in the media—as out-of-touch, tweedy dilettantes. In particular, this project can counter the perceptions of the masculine heroic quest narrative that linger despite our field's critique and attention to it (Brannon, “M[other]: Lives on the Outside"). Secondly, we aim to highlight the different options, choices, and pathways available to women academics and to ask women themselves—ourselves—to narrate the possibilities, pitfalls, and complexities of their professional lives.

We hope that since these narratives are placed in the DALN site, members of the profession will be able to see different realities and work experiences represented and can gain a wider view of the profession and its women workers. Researchers and readers will be able to learn about patterns of work, productivity, and struggle from a wide range of institutions. This archive also will do more than tell us who is “making it” or not “making it;” it will tell a larger story or stories about how women move through their professional lives at various institutions and at different ages and stages--we can bring together all of our Sisyphean stories.

Notes

1 (return) Sarah Gibbard Cook, in “Higher education is losing thousands of competent, well-educated women,” summarizes the statistics for women in higher education exceptionally well: In 1966 women earned only 12% of the doctorates awarded. Today women are about 44% of new PhDs, and almost 50% of recipients who are U.S. citizens; well over half the bachelor's and master's degrees now go to women. Yet only 25% of tenured or tenure-track faculty at UC Berkeley are women, similar to other research universities. The problem isn't just a time lag that will correct itself as more women enter the pipeline. Nationwide the gender ratio among tenured faculty has stayed about the same since 1975. The pipeline has serious leaks.

Some blame lifelong discrimination; women are treated differently from infancy. Others say workplace rigidity forces women to choose between work and family. Both could be true. Mason and Goulden decided to test the work-vs.-family theory using long-term data from the national Survey of Doctorate Recipients, which followed more than 160,000 scholars since the 1970s. Leaks occur all along the pipeline, with the biggest leak at the beginning.

· *Doctorate to entry position*. Of those married with children under age six, the dads were 50% more likely to get an assistant professorship than the moms. This hasn't improved over time. Married women were 20% less likely than single women to enter the tenure track and having babies carried a 29% penalty. Single women without babies had a 50% advantage over married moms.

· *Entry to tenure*. Women assistant professors proved 23% less likely than men to become associate professors, the promotion that usually brings tenure. "Married with children" described most of the men who got tenure but only a minority of the women. · Remarkably, single mothers did better than married ones. "Our speculation is that they don't have other options. They have to have a full-time career, so they keep pushing through the barriers," [Dr. Marc] Goulden told WIHE [Women in Higher Education].

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